

C O R A D D I

SUMMER 1971 - WINTER 1975

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

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# CORADDI

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

SUMMER, 1971

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CORADDI is the student fine arts magazine of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. All work may be submitted at any time in Room 205, Elliot Hall.

This issue starts a new year for CORADDI and, in many ways, a new beginning. Over the decades, CORADDI has, like an old man, slowed down. Though he has kept up with the times, he has been unable to become a part of those times. With each year, CORADDI became less and less active until last year when, due to unfortunate circumstances, there was no publication. Well, the magazine came quite close to extinction, but a rebirth has occurred. It is now time for CORADDI to introduce its new self. In order to get to know the magazine a little better, we felt that you, the reader, should be given a short retrospect of CORADDI over the years. All the poetry and the fiction was lifted, if you will, from past CORADDI magazines we found laying about the office. Rather than use them for wallpaper, we decided to put together a small sampling of CORADDI's tradition. If you blow the dust off a few of these works, you might uncover some fairly nice writing.

The poetry of today may seem in many respects quite different from the poetry of even ten years ago and especially the poetry of forty years ago. The truth is poetry's face may alter, but its fingerprints have been stamped the same since the first word was uttered. The poets of today write what Homer, Milton, and Shakespeare wrote, but with new styles and new energy. Poetry is a straight line and only one. Its length runs as long as time itself, but its subject matter all falls within the width of that one thin line. Therefore, it is not beyond reason that comparisons should be made between then and now, between CORADDI of forty years ago and CORADDI of today.

Having had very little experience with the editorship of a literary magazine and being a male (and more incompetent than most), the aid I was given over the summer should not go unacknowledged. Therefore, I wish to thank Betty Van Storey, Cheryl East, Harry Bynum, and Nancy Moore, editor-in-chief of THE CAROLINIAN, for their thoughtful help, and Cary IBM for its cooperation and wit.

Also, I must acknowledge each and every previous CORADDI editor and staff member, for without them this issue would not have been possible!

R. G. N.

"We have been asked to explain how and why the CORADDI got its name. For the benefit of those who know not—the magazine was, at first, the charge of the three literary societies—Cornelian, Adelphian, and Dikean. From each of the three societies then existing the CORADDI procured part of its name . . . ."

Edith Webb  
CORADDI Editor, 1929

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## A MOURNING

And  
On an afternoon  
Late with snow  
The gladiola sun  
Came rolling from the sky  
To hide itself icily warm  
In the nothingness of ground.

And  
In the dusky time  
The snow made soft sounds  
While shrouding the warmth,  
And from grey seasonal clouds  
The cloths of winding spiraled  
Unceasingly downward.

And  
In this shaded time,  
Mingling with the grey,  
Came the mourners;  
Old ladies first in lavender  
Who in quiet whispers  
Told of death and dark.

And  
In the evening early  
Enter then the gentlemen  
On muffled black feet  
Who from their coats of dark  
Were whishing of the snow  
As soundlessly they met the others.

And  
In the late of night hiding all  
In dark and funeral sad  
They spread their great coats  
Then knelt silently to pray  
For the Lazarus sun  
Throughout the night.

Margaret E. Graves

TO WALK BAREFOOT IN THE GRASS  
*FOR MARILYN*

To walk barefoot on the grass  
And it was March, and the world was frozen  
And the sawtooth wind to which the trees knelt  
Was at the door, asking shelter from the night

And each crystal star was crackling in the sky,  
Frozen in heaven, waiting for the sun to come  
But it was dark now, and the rocks on the hillside,  
The pebbles in the field, stood calling

To their maker, but he did not hear  
And the mourning haze stood on the grass  
Watching the night as it flew away to the south  
For the summer and called to earth the

Sawtooth wind, for to hear a nightbird's song  
And to go a'walking on the grass  
Though it was March and the world was frozen  
And I opened the door for the sawtooth wind

Ronald Woodell

### THE EQUATORIAL

The time of year when all my blood is thick,  
This is the season when my heart must die.

Shortly before the noon is always high—  
The time of year when all my blood is thick—

Aches the red tongue and even veins are sick:  
This is the season when my heart must die.

Diana's hounds are dead, and she must lie  
Hot from the hunt and ill, her body slick,  
But not with oil. And in the southern sky  
The fires of the roaring summer lick.

Here and in Greece the summer vaults the sky;  
Nothing once green is either green or quick;

The time of year when all my blood is thick  
Is the short season when my heart must die.

## THE SUICIDE

(Addressed to the absent lover)

The iron Daniel Webster greens with rust  
As squatting pigeons sleep in his cold hands  
Through this October afternoon. Boys chalk  
The name plate given out of boom and bust  
That proves America is more than talk.  
And here the graying light will stoop to dark  
Before the hour's out. I wait and walk  
The blasted stone of leafless Central Park  
Thinking of you, and hoping you will come  
To lead me from this place and take me home  
Where I can wash my life out with your hands.

I count the red and green stop-lights of hell  
Between Fifth Avenue and the wide Styx  
Where I shall flounder when you come no more  
To bring me love or one rag of a tale.  
My life's as limp as wash. Who'll settle for  
This lump of bone and nerve with twenty-three  
Years of a life unstitched? Most men want more  
Than I can give. Will you come back to me  
Before I hang my life out on a string?  
I must go home. I'd give you anything  
If you would hold my hand across the Styx!

Goodnight. I'm going home before I freeze.  
Remember this girl who put into you hands  
A little life to finger for a while:  
A cotton sack of flesh with ragged knees  
Not wet from birth before she swam free style  
For higher ground in hell. The birds are plump  
That waddle through a ceremonial  
The end of which is in the iron rump  
Of Daniel Webster blackened by the dark  
To insignificance in Central Park  
Where one girl wrings her life out with her hands.

Roger Hecht

## EX CATHEDRA

You know the obscene scrawling  
On the walls of my soul  
And have whispered hurried elegies  
Over mouthfuls of dirt;  
You knew the wild wounds  
Of my soldier scars  
When we celebrated the end  
Of an old war  
With tin cans and broken pillows.  
There were moons between us  
And afternoon hills,  
And once a tree  
That I can't find any more  
Because they have taken the tree away  
Along with the hill.  
Once, we mourned together  
For a generation not our own,  
And for my sake you tried  
To call the flowers by name,  
Crawled tearless to an angry bed.  
Now there are other lives to live.  
You are still a priest without an altar  
Walking in a city of blue streets,  
And you think there are islands between us  
When there is really only sky.  
Because we waited for  
Something  
In the silence of a shabby room,  
And although the fashion  
Of this clever age condemns it,  
I breathe these words:  
Old friend,  
Time is between us  
And not against us.  
Although we hunt  
In different forests  
We walk on similar leaves  
Scorched to different colors  
By the same sun.  
I do not burn incense  
Scorched to different colors  
In flickering temples  
Or light candles  
To undo the past.  
I am my own cathedral  
And strange saints  
Walk within me.

Robert Harson



## AUTUMN

After the sweaty shirts, and people stricken  
by the low leaning head, resisting change,  
the mediator comes to temper, reckon  
with that extravagance. There is a strange

peace in the invulnerable, sterile stubble  
embossed against the field: dehydrated,  
relieved of potency. Self-conscious rabble,  
the nervous leaves, now bronze, once green and red,

fall; and the earth is purged with ashes and amber;  
a searing wind strips raw; the soft, slow mist  
is salve. ~~Salve~~ Fall dismembers to re-member,  
and the blood flows between wrist and wrist.

## OR DO YOU THINK THE NIGHT IS WHAT IT SEEMS ?

I heard a voice call to me in the night  
Deep in my ears, and far, I felt your voice  
Tremble to me—to someone—and I slipped  
Up to the voice, and waited . . . nothing more,  
And listened . . . but you did not call again.

A moment—did you struggle past your sleep?  
“Are you awake?” I brushed the silence back  
But it flowed front again and you were still  
And slept, as you had slept, as you would sleep.  
But were you never crying in your sleep?

Do you think the night only what it seems?  
The shadows come at me with gentle hands  
To smother me back where my eyes are open.

What walks this room? It draws against my skin  
Cold, heavy, waiting—moving to the dark;  
It touches you (you cried out in your sleep)  
You feel it (for you cried it in your sleep)  
And yet we neither know, and when at last  
We pull ourselves to waking, neither speak

But move apart in our own silences  
And fear to break the shadows back again.

Alma Graham

## PROGRESSION I

Day melts as coolly as spray returning to the sea.  
Drops off as petals from a daisy;  
Succombs as sails bend into the mist-rubbed pencil-line.

Clear, the night is a bell across the waves,  
A chance brush of dew-strung grass against bare legs,  
And a pool the tide forgot.

## PROGRESSION II

Silent, the geometry of gulls,  
Creative in the sloping curve of flight.  
Calm, the wordless move of sea—  
Moon-soaked and star-bespeckled in the night.

Dim the string of lanterns, candle-soft,  
Ascends the rocks to find the chapel bell—  
Clear, ring out to where a buoy  
Answers what the waves would have it tell.

—Mary Leighton

## WORKINGS

*For his neat pasture and his pleasure  
a farmer has arranged  
a grove of wide-spaced trees.  
Gravely they touch and change.  
One is knighted by lightning,  
laid out in thick bark and peace,  
and the same place taken by a seedling  
that never need rise by crooked thrusts  
for its beginning is noted  
and there is no underbrush.  
Thus they quietly change  
while the man keeps his land arranged.*

*A head is full of tentacles curled  
all moist and lapping together.  
Slowly they separate, unfurl,  
rise and finger along each other,  
but finding no root or tip, recurl  
into the workings of their smother.  
Sometimes one works up a wiry strength  
and stretches itself into a tendril  
to wind around and clamp on others,  
but overreaching its length  
is broken loose as though brittle.  
Thus they tangle, twist and bore  
as any tentacles dark on ocean floors.*

*The Ganges is a lubricant to bathing-ghats,  
to grimacing, withered arms and all Benares.  
Elbows gimlet through the city  
and come at last to the holy bathing-ghats,  
where every pool of air floats up  
its mass of frantic, fragile gnats.  
Or, at another end of the Great Land Mass,  
a delicate hum has brushed one signal ear  
the night is spent on racks  
three-tiered against a darkening wall,  
on straw as damp as grass  
thinning against a concrete floor—  
when, say, the sky is frantic with its war.*

*When first from the socket of the skull,  
wires lie few and close with bone,  
then carefully fork and fork  
until flesh feels itself intricate wires alone.  
Or cities lie wired like contracted nations:  
every street from suburb to wharf  
is interlaid with spindling nerves.  
A switch is pulled at a power house  
and street lights darken like some misplaced  
ovation.  
All night the wires sing of detonation.*

## EASTER: THE GRACE OF THE LAMB

A fuzz is spread along the limbs to break, at heat,  
Hard into sweet ungainly flowerings;  
Hear! hid the soft bird sings  
The sweetness that is hid  
Quick in the stiffening stalk, stark flourishes, the sweet  
Surprise of grace to stead the awkward kid  
And grace his shapeless flings.

Winter was starkly bare, but this is something starker:  
In the bare thrust of limbs the season's goad  
Agitates abroad,  
In lips that trembling move  
To cry the painful hope of that sweet-throated barker;  
Staggers him whom Spring will stiffen to love  
And a more graceful load.

Father, our Winter is bare-boughed, our birth was cold,  
And stark the thrusting blizzard that we breathe.  
When will the bare cross seethe  
With breaking buds, and bow  
Us awkward-limbed, who shake to quit our shaken fold,  
Before the Springs that wash our bareness through,  
Our limbs with graces wreath.

Edwin Watkins

## WALK: SUNDAY MORNING

The old man watching as you and I watch  
Too old for hatred, too tired to remember  
And the wistful dog whose face is like our face  
Twenty years age, and his face like our face  
Twenty years hence—the forgotten face  
When you and I will want to remember.  
There. The one with the blind stare.  
What a lovely vague tweed, what tailoring  
---waiting at the entry door for an arrival.  
I never thought of walking here before  
You knew it would be interesting  
Listening to critiques---on buttoned shoes---on  
half-slips  
in a specious present.  
The small group there, cleverly dressed, laughing over  
tea . . .  
How many years of travel will it take us  
to define their gaiety as passion?  
We would be uneasy near such perfection.  
That one, driving at such a reckless speed  
He's the type that agrees with you  
when he doesn't know what you are saying.  
A few things support a heavy life.  
Life, the powerful, indefinable sense of well-being  
not when they say "Poor dear. You shouldn't have"  
But when, vaguely wondering, you look forward to  
                  seeing them again  
And plan in advance which way to run  
---always retracing our steps to the entry door.  
Refusing invitations to teas, to dances, and just-to-  
chats.  
Fondling the short, sticky fingers of apprehension  
like the dog whose face is like our face  
in a specious present.

Waldenmaier

## RIVERSIDE WIFE

You come from a long house,  
A long stone house of prayers.  
River Sundays and muddy barefoot praise  
Damned up the days  
Of your summer riot.

I don't know that house.  
My house was a windmill  
Moss-stacked and tall,  
A dim green glimmer in the heat.

We look in the book of your house.  
The men and their women peel brownly,  
And their legends stiffly crack.  
You say:  
"Grandpa went round on Sunday mornings  
To every house,  
Knocked on its door with his big blue knife,  
And collected his nigger rent."

Your Grandpa wore several white beards,  
Not one, but several,  
Rippling across his face, like frosty vines.  
And your Grandma held a German silver purse,  
A grey crushed mesh of vanity.  
The cradle, church, and churn had left famine  
Where there should have glowed memory.  
She was more buttonhook than woman.

Grandma and Grandpa rose  
To their river church on their river Sunday  
In the green rush of a river-strangled May.  
Then the hollow wives sat beside their strange mates,  
And the ivy twined its starving toward God.

When they returned,  
Stiff and hot in the new spring balm of Gilead,  
He was calm.  
He picked up the poker  
And struck her, the wife of his bosom.  
Severely, methodically, without passion,  
The black soot streaked her pale old-fashioned skin.  
She put up her hands,  
Like poor old ivory fans  
Left over from a masquerade.  
Then he left her by the best hearth,  
Swept bare of fire,  
In the stiff front room where a tall mantel clock ticked stupidly,  
And the frozen stares of her children  
Stared frozenly out of their heavy oak frames.

He went to his barn,  
To his rope that he had thrown up  
Over the loft beams  
In the cool fluttering early morning.  
The field lark sang.  
The horses frisked,  
Their big veins twitched with the blood-push.  
He stood,  
Still calm.  
Oh, balm of Gilead,  
Sweet mint of my father,  
Caress me.

You have said these gifts are mine:  
The big blue knife, the stiff buttonhook,  
Grey German silver, sweet balm of Gilead.  
But I say I don't know that house.  
In the still early morning,  
Let us flee.  
Let us take the balm and steep it into sweet tea.  
The book of my house is full of blank pages.  
No green river riot rages  
In the cool clover-white of my house.

When their Sunday is over,  
And the muddy feet have stamped out the mounds of their praise,  
We can walk on to higher grounds in warmer days,  
Through the rank wild green.  
Easy, quiet, faintly incarnadine.

SISTER TO BROTHER:  
AN ADMONITION TO REMEMBER HIS CHILDHOOD

Tell me, brother, how old are we?  
A kettle crouches on the unfired coals; your hands  
Confuse themselves with whittling on the table top  
And I rest thinking of the wind outside which knots  
Itself about the chilly moon. We are growing older  
Than we ever wished to be. Remember how we said  
We'd die at twenty, and now that we are nearing  
Twenty-three, think that we shall live at least  
To thirty. The kettle starts to sing itself to sleep  
Since you have stirred the fire. I did not notice,  
Folded as I was between your fingers, and buckled  
Up in silence by the wind. Now, how go the flames?  
They will not touch the curling moon which crisps  
Like some small red ash against the pane,  
And cannot warm the burning wind which strives  
To heap before us time with all its vagueries.  
Your frowning nails my tongue to wooden words.  
Excuse such childish speaking but tomorrow is your  
Marriage day, and I am everywhere reminded  
That all we ever have is history.

Sylvia Eidam





The years are built with children's blocks  
'til the day they topple too high to remain tall,  
and i must start anew.



## *POEM FOR MY DAUGHTER*

*In the pale April rain,  
I walk the deer park.  
Silently, on buckhorn and clovernubs,  
Honeysuckle, maypop, sage, and scotchbroom  
Silently, the thin rain falls.*

*In the cool echo of rain doves,  
I remember my name,  
My name in summer, at evening.  
There the bee never murmurs.  
And his hot wild honey  
Is figged, peared, appled,  
Syrup and sunjell dappled.  
Here the wet wild bee  
Flutters and falls.*

*The birds lay blue eggs, I know.  
And the birds' blue shells  
Were part of that simple blue  
Seen in a wide-washed sky and infant eye.  
And the warm palm-clouds swung their fronds  
Before the royal, marching sun.  
Still the clouds swing:  
They turn and face east for one half,  
Then, turn, and face west for another.*

*You only know rock pools  
Where red fish glimmer cold.  
And little girls bend to fret the ripples  
Under a freckled sun.*

*You are sweetly with me,  
Here in the deer park,  
In the rain-pale, green-dark evening.  
The red fish feint away,  
And you blame it on some Jack-with-a-lantern elf.*

*Rain doves call wearily,  
And my summer name settles wornly  
Among the damp pale trees,  
Too nervously stirred by a night-spiced breeze.*

*Heather Ross Miller*

## THE TIME OF SUMMER

No need to mull it over now,  
You've left it.  
The yellowed afternoons  
And the yellowed piano keys in the dim camphoric  
Parlor: The thin ivory sunlight  
That was like no other sunlight you have ever seen  
When, moving in dusty columns  
Through curtains of spidered lace,  
It invaded the cornered places of the knick-knacks  
And warmed the marble elephant  
And held with tremulous irrevocable fingers  
A thousand voices of a thousand yesterdays  
And pressed them close against the walls and ceiling  
To be kept and kissed and remembered.

I have seen their faces in the clouded glass  
They have passed before me on the blackened grass  
They live in tintype in a musty cellar  
I have heard the ancient tarantella plucked  
From the dust of a broken and buried mandolin.

Oh when we played, do you  
Remember how we played  
Under the grape arbor in the rust and moss  
With a broken saucer and muddy purple-stained  
Fingers fed purple grapes to a faceless doll.

And from the house the noonday radio  
The hidden lathe going scree-aw-eeee  
The barking barking puppy that later we found  
In the gutter  
With dried brown blood all over its smashed  
and still face.

And in the swollen attic heat  
They were there  
Where the light was darkest  
Sighing in deep silences (I heard them  
Sighing there.)

Yet it is not hard to remember, is it,  
On Sunday afternoon, The visit:  
Take vermouth and Torrone from Sicily  
A pink paper napkin spread on the knee  
And effusively tense cordiality;  
Let us sit upon the Belgian tapestry  
And die.

In that doleyed era of the demitasse  
The accustomed touch of anisette  
The chandelier of prisms glass  
That twittered like a castanet  
A lullaby in violet.

She had a proud firm mouth  
When she was young  
That would not let her love,  
Or be loved.  
And in solemn stiffened pride  
Made herself a martyred bride.

(How could a curse once half-implied  
Have generations crucified?)

And the night comes now  
And shades are drawn against the asphalt  
And the neon of the perspiring city.  
And in the other room the clock ticks  
And in the other room the heart beats  
And palms turn upward on the coverlet  
As on a cross  
And in the room the eyes stare diffidently  
While lights of the passing caravans  
Sweep shifting seas upon the wall.

Hidden cubicles in a deserted mind  
Can hold an immense and endured exhaustion.  
And, really, what is there left for one to do  
tomorrow  
But frown at oneself there in the glass  
While arranging a bit of silk at the throat?  
What is there left?

No need to mull it over now.  
No need  
When at one a.m. in the rain-rinsed air  
You can turn your face past the rough lapel  
Of a white dinner jacket and see  
The sleepwalkers moving around and against you,  
Soft and uncertain and scented as the Springtime;  
When the glow from the floodlit terrace  
Traces in gold a tender, curved, and grave mouth;  
When they pipe from the cardboard and spangled  
bandstand,  
Sweet, lonely, and faraway.  
"Laura is the face in the misty light."

Arlene Croce

CLOISTERS: 1946

I

More than the bells were loiterers  
In that uneasy night bristling with stars  
And lightfoot shadows hiding in the leaves.  
Only the moths ruffled the darkness  
And the unmarried moon  
Taunted them in the eaves.  
More than the cloistered walls  
Let moonlight slide into the river.  
I, too, was cloistered  
And a wall to more than moonlight,  
But the wide bridge swung  
And hung like a salmon panting upward,  
Then it fell. One restless bell  
Bumped at the darkness and the wind  
Flapped in the trees.

II

This is a boyish town.  
Lean autos bown down the long drive  
To some appluaded end. The harbor  
Burns like a star-topped tree that may,  
After a week descend stiffened and dry  
Into the outer hall, to lie there  
Until someone comes to carry it away.

We heard a pilot hurrying his ship home  
Through ragged coasts  
Reefed with tomorrow's news:  
'Plane crashes Empire State.'  
And if we wait one year or five  
Is it the date that matters?  
Or if I stay to ease their sins  
If I survive the cleansing of my whims,  
Survive the lectures, holidays and ways  
Of passing time, what then?  
If they should say, 'You're gifted,  
Though you don't believe in God.  
You have a way with people. You are kind.  
They sense you have a gentle mind.'

The shadow of a leaf fell down  
Between your face and me hiding the scar  
Some cracked plates left you falling  
When you were small and fell down stairs  
And up them carrying things. Leaves fall  
And children, and the two have something  
Common to them, ease perhaps,  
And ample laps to lie in.

Would you prefer to find me  
In the lost and found of proper papers  
Like any glove somebody ground  
Into the street, than face me  
In the neat uneasy columns of the news?  
There have been times  
When want ads seem almost the worst,  
Almost despair.

Was any body there?  
Was anybody there in the darkness?  
Was it your voice or my own?

When will you go?  
You're sure you want to, I see that.  
Only I'd like to know,  
What shall I tell them,  
That you *want* to leave . . . ?

Tell them I'm leaving them because . . .  
Oh, tell them I'm a coward, or a fool,  
Or anything.  
You understand me, don't you?

Oh, how slow  
The river moved, like a deep bell  
That starts to ring in the beginning of a dream  
And never rings out loud until you wake  
Suddenly and it is daybreak. And you seem  
To hear it for the first time  
When it goes.

Of course I do.

Well, then, let them believe what pleases them.  
As long as you believe me.

### III

The clock on the far shore  
Remembered where we were  
And a low star listed a little  
Like the boats we saw below us.  
Still we stayed watching the ferris wheel  
Turn like a roasting spit, watching the harbor  
Burn in branching fire.

He may die. Others have done it.  
I will cry and cry and never stop forever.

Don't stand there looking  
At the river as if it were a ghost  
You'd like to kill if it would die.  
There are no ghost to boast of anymore.  
Only the living terrify.  
Come here. It's cold in the night air.  
I felt a drowsiness begin  
To push along my arms and moonlight  
Slipping from my hands down the wet grass.  
We saw the ferry pass for the last time  
That night and heard the bell once, then no more.  
The light went out above us in the tower.

We can come back again.  
I knew you lied.

Tonight we ride on a blacked out train  
Far from the lighted harbor and the shore  
By other towers standing in the rain.  
The married moon was never beautiful before.

—Nancy Siff Murphy

**'The Ruins of Time builds Mansions in Eternity.'**

**--William Blake**



## THE EVER-BLESSING OF THE GRASSES

The ever-blessing of the grasses,  
the children, like the sun, will ever-appear through the trees,  
early arriving through blasts of branches.

Endlessly they imitate the sun.

Glowing and rising; burning, descending  
they ignite the days with the dreams of their nights.  
And bursting their houses into garlands of flames,  
they fulfill the evenings.

With morning, they approach the yards of day,  
shaking their luminous hair.

Riding the weather like small horsemen,  
they construct its temper from the constant fantasy:  
arms strain upwards, waver, descend;  
London Bridges rise and fall.

The impulse of their tune contains their heat,  
sinks underground. It rises, and breaking earth,  
sounds the green of the various grasses.

The shattered air rewinds itself  
within the weaving tongues  
and sings with them the ceremony.  
falling down, falling down.

And splitting the children's tune  
into countless inches of light,  
the day begins to sing its measure;  
the impulse renews its flow.  
Underground the earth is rising,  
building up, building up.

In the grasses growing greener, brighter,  
the children stretch long like late shadows  
and burn their images into the dusk  
while it falls, falls down upon their darkening hair.

And suddenly they rise  
into the final pleasure of their music,  
building, rising, rising up;  
and shaping the weather with a final fire,  
they destroy their houses with garlands of flames.

Bertha Harris

## A TOAST FOR GRANDPA

Ellen Metz

Grandpa's picture covered half of one end of our parlor. My nose just came up to the edge of the gilt frame. Unless the chandelier was on, the parlor was almost dark, just light enough for the frame to glitter. Grandpa looked even bigger when I sat on the floor and looked up at him. He was standing beside a black mare with his hand on the pommel of the saddle. Behind him, kind of dim, were the stables and the white fences. The fences were still back of the house, but they weren't white. They were grey and broken down in places. The stables were out back, too, but they were empty except for boards with nails sticking out at the ends. I used to go down there and rummage. It was dark and damp and smelled moldy. One day a snake crawled out from under a stack of boards. I watched it, black and shiny, crawl across the dirt floor and wiggle underneath the wall. When I went outside, the weeds against the rock foundation were shaking a little, but the snake was gone.

We lived in the big house by ourselves—Mama, Grandma, and I. We used to live with Grandpa, but he died just before I was born. Grandma said he was rich. She said Grandpa built our house for her on the old plantation site just outside of town. Everyone came to the big party they gave when the house was opened. She and Grandpa danced and Grandpa rode with the guests across the estate on the black mare, jumping the white fence behind the house. I don't remember anyone coming to see us though, except a few old people Grandma knew. They lived in the houses like ours scattered down the road. The houses all looked big and grey, with bay-windows and lightning rods. The old lady next door came to see Grandma most until she moved away. Then a man put up a big sign with lights over her front porch, and cars would come one day and leave the next.

One afternoon an old couple I had never seen before came to see Grandma. The old man could hardly walk up the path to our house. His skin was yellow and his voice was hollow. Grandma called them Carl and Esther. They sat in the parlor and talked for a long time. Esther told Grandma how thankful she ought to be that she could keep up her

home. She said that they were going to Florida to live with their son.

"We sold everything but the car," she said. "My son said he could get a better price for that in Florida. I told Carl he wasn't able to drive, but he insisted . . ."

"Of course, I can drive," Carl interrupted. "Just been a little under the weather for a while. I'll be all right when I get a little rest. Just as good a man as I ever was."

"John was always strong, too," Grandma said. "It was such a shock when he died—such a shock."

"John was a fine man, a fine man," Carl said. "Knew how to get things done. Certainly changed things here at your old home."

Carl and Esther ate at our house that night. Grandma had excused herself and had gone out to the kitchen to talk to Annie, the maid. I watched Annie open the big dining room and put on the lace tablecloth. It was a little yellow, but it looked all right in the candle-light. Annie fed me early in the kitchen. While she aired out the bedroom across from mine, Grandma tried to put me to bed. They had never tried to put me to bed that early before. I sat on the edge of the bed and wouldn't pull off my clothes. I stared straight at Grandma. "I'll yell," I said. "If you try to put me to bed, I'll yell." I saw Mama go down the hall all dressed to go out.

"Doris," Grandma called to Mama, "Doris, do talk to Esther and Carl while I put her to bed."

"I'm going out," Mama said. "It wasn't my idea to put her to bed." She walked on down the hall.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Doris Mason," Grandma said. "You don't even take care of your own child."

Mama whirled around and looked at Grandma. "You don't think I can raise her," she said. "I know she's a pain in the neck, but you are going to make a lady out of her. Go on and make one out of her." Mama turned and walked down the hall.

Grandma went out into the hall, too, saying, "Oh, dear, Oh, dear." I sat on the edge of the bed and swung my legs back and forth, still dressed. In a few

minutes Annie came into the room. I gave my legs another swing.

"I don't want to go to bed early," I announced.

"You don't never want to go to bed no time," Annie said. She came over to the bed and began jerking off my blouse. "I don't want to go to bed," I protested, beginning to wail.

"I ain't got time to fool with you," Annie said. "Now you shut your mouf and go to bed or I'm going to beat your behind."

I decided to stop crying. It worked with Grandma, but it never did with Annie. "Annie," I said, "you're mean."

"You mean yourself," she said. "You a little devil."

"I'm a little devil?" I asked. Then I started chanting: "I'm a little devil, I'm a little devil . . ."

The next morning Annie woke me up and dressed me in a frilly dress. I hadn't worn it in a long time and it felt tight. Annie took me into the parlor. Grandma took me by the hand and told Esther and Carl that I was her granddaughter. I didn't like the two old people. The old man coughed, a deep rattly cough. The old woman said, "Dear me, what a sweet little girl." She looked up and down my bare legs sticking out from under my too-short dress.

"I'm not a sweet little girl," I said. "I'm a little devil." The old man laughed and slapped his knee, then started coughing.

"Dear me," the old woman said. "Dear me."

"Annie," Grandma said, drawing herself up, "you may take her now."

"Yes'm," Annie said. When she got me outside she gave me a pop on my bottom and said, "How come you always got to say things like that?" But she was grinning.

After Esther and Carl left, Annie put away the tablecloth and closed up the big dining room. Nobody ate in there any more until Aunt Jennie came. I don't remember ever hearing about Aunt Jennie before she came, but I found out afterward that she was Grandpa's younger sister. I heard about her first one rainy day when I was playing cave under the bed in the room across from mine. It was dark in the bedroom because Grandma kept the blinds closed all the time. It was even darker under the big canopied bed. I had left one of the rolling doors cracked and could see Grandma when she rushed into Mama's room fluttering a letter and saying, "Oh dear, Oh, dear."

"What am I going to do?" I heard her say to Mama. "What am I going to do?" She said something about "Jennie" and began reading the letter. "Dr. Mason," it called her. "Permanently incapacitated . . . partially paralyzed . . . nearest of kin." I heard Mama stutter something.

"Oh, no," Grandma said, her voice high and giggling. "Oh no, she wouldn't take any money. Oh

no, she wouldn't ever come to see us. She said she could take care of herself better than we could take care of her. But now look, now that she's paralyzed and helpless . . ."

"For God's sake," Mama said, her voice getting loud, too. "Calm down. You're driving me crazy."

"Oh, you don't have to worry," Grandma said. "You don't have to worry. I'm the one that always has to . . ."

"Oh God," Mama said, "Oh God. Don't start that again."

The day Aunt Jennie was supposed to come Grandma told Annie that she wanted the big dining room opened.

"Just for her?" Annie asked. "And her crippled?"

"Yes," Grandma said. "Don't argue, Annie."

"I ain't arguing," Annie said, "and I'll do this once, but I ain't going to do it every night just because you dead husband's sister's here. I'll quit first."

When Aunt Jennie came, the dining room was ready and the big bedroom was opened. Aunt Jennie came in a taxi with one battered suitcase. Grandma came to the door in a black silk dress.

"Jennie," she said, "I am so glad you finally have come to see us."

"Thank you," was all Aunt Jennie said.

"Do let me take you to your room, poor dear," Grandma said.

Aunt Jennie pulled her arm away. "No," she said, "No, I can walk by myself." I watched Aunt Jennie drag her crippled foot across the hall in to the bedroom.

That night Grandma dressed me up while Annie was in the kitchen and brought me to the table. Mama was out again, so she wasn't around. Annie knocked on Aunt Jennie's door and Grandma and I waited, staring at each other across the table. "Everything's getting cold," Annie said. We waited a few more minutes, then Grandma started to leave the table. "I've never been so insulted in my life," she said. "Never. Nobody can be genteel around here. Annie, bring me a glass of water upstairs—and an aspirin."

Just as Grandma was leaving, Aunt Jennie came in, dragging her foot slowly, dressed the same way she had been when she came. She sat down at the table. Grandma sat down, too, but she didn't look at Aunt Jennie. Aunt Jennie couldn't reach anything on the table but the bread. I watched her take a slice and begin breaking it over her empty plate. It didn't look like Grandma was going to do anything and Annie hadn't come back from getting the aspirin yet, so I reached for a vegetable dish. It was heavy. I held it tightly in both hands, extending it toward Aunt Jennie.

"Have beans, Aunt Jennie," I said.

Grandma looked at me. The dish tilted and the hot beans poured out over my hand and onto the table,

dripping off the edge.

"Now look at what you've gone and done," Annie said behind me. "Give me that." She snatched the dish from my hands and gave me a push back into my chair. She mopped the beans off my hand with a dishcloth and then began on the table. Grandma didn't seem to notice anything. We went on eating. That was the last time we had dinner in the big dining room.

I got used to Aunt Jennie around before long. She wandered through the big house, dragging her paralyzed leg—tall, thin, stooped and dark—not doing anything and apparently not caring. She didn't bother me much but she bothered Grandma.

"She disapproves of us," Grandma would say, twisting her hands. "She used to let us alone. But now she watches us. I can just feel her eyes watching us." Her lips would tremble. "And after all we've done for her. Given her a home and . . ."

"Oh, for God's sake," Mama would interrupt irritably, "why can't you just forget it?"

It wasn't just Aunt Jennie who let us alone. Nobody bothered with me much. Just once in a while somebody would. I wished they would let me alone all the time. Annie did everything for me. I had everything I needed. I was fed, washed, dressed. As soon as everybody got out of the way, I would run like mad to play with the kids in the brick house across the road. They were let alone pretty much, too. I went over there first with Annie. Dacy, the painted-up colored girl that kept the kids, was a good friend of Annie's. The two of them would leave in a hurry as soon as they got off work and would come in sometime in the morning. I could hear them outside my window. They would screech up to the house in a jalopy full of singing, yelling darkies just before dawn. I would tip out into the hallway in my baggy pajamas and lean over the rail. When Annie came in, I would whisper so as not to wake anybody: "Annie's got a sweetheart, Annie's got a sweetheart."

"You shut your mouf and go to bed."

"I'm not afraid of you." I would prance down the stairs just enough, careful to stay out of reach. "Annie's got a sweetheart. Annie's got a sweetheart."

"You better go back to bed and shut up," she would say, threatening me with her brown hand.

Something would move in Mama's room. Both of us would scram—fast. When Mama was asleep, she wanted to stay that way. Usually, though, Annie wasn't very careful. She knew Grandma wouldn't really say anything to her for fear she would quit, and just anybody wouldn't work for the wages Annie was getting. But Annie was doing all right. She put up a good front and it looked respectable for her to work. Plenty of people gave her money. Mama wasn't any worry for Annie. Mama had been out nearly every night since I could remember. I didn't like the guys she ran around with. They called me "kid" and told

me to "beat it." I was glad to. Usually I wasn't around in the first place. Usually I was across the road playing.

Sometimes I didn't even bother to come home for meals. We could always swipe something out of the ice-box when Dacy wasn't looking. Annie said that the place across the road had been a part of Grandpa's estate, that Grandma had sold it right after Grandpa died. I told Jerry, the boy my age, that it was ours once. He said it wasn't, it was his Daddy's and he was going to ask him if it wasn't. I could have argued with him, I guess, but I decided to let it pass. I could see that he didn't believe Annie, and I didn't feel like asking Grandma if it were true.

I usually got the best of Jerry, though. His Daddy was a mill supervisor and his mother was a secretary. Nobody at my house worked. My Grandpa had been rich, and my Mama went to parties with men in big cars. I got the best of Jerry the time he said I didn't have a Daddy. He said I didn't have a daddy and I said I did, too. He said, "Yeah, where is he?" and I didn't know. I said I didn't know but would he like to see my Grandpa's picture?

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Over there," I said, pointing across the road.

"In the house?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, putting my hands on my hips. "You aren't scared, are you?"

"No," he said, "I ain't scared, but I ain't going either."

"Sissy," I said. "Sissy."

"All right," Jerry said. "Let's go."

We slipped through the front door and peeked into the parlor. Nobody was in sight, so we tiptoed up to the picture, me going ahead of Jerry. Jerry stuck his hands in his pockets and looked at the picture, his eyes big. "Gee," he whispered. He looked little standing in front of the big gilt frame.

"Grandpa was rich," I whispered in his ear. My voice sounded so loud in the quiet room it scared me.

"Gee," he said again.

Then we heard somebody walking in the back of the house and we had to get out—fast.

The next day I decided that I was going to find out if I had a daddy or not. I went into the kitchen where Annie was cooking dinner. I sat down in a chair and propped my elbows on the table.

"What you want?" Annie asked.

"Have I got a daddy, Annie?" I asked.

"Everybody got a daddy," she said.

"Jerry said I didn't," I said, rolling a glass across the table and catching it just before it fell off.

"Jerry don't know 'bout your daddy," Annie said, taking the glass away from me.

"Do you know 'bout my daddy, Annie?" I asked.

"I never saw him," Annie said. "They got a annulment. Now you get out of here and quit bothering me."

"What's an annulment?" I asked, following Annie around the room, trying to step on her shadow.

"You go out and play," Annie said.

"Look, Annie," I said, still following her. "I'm stepping on your shadow. What's an annulment, Annie?"

"I done told you to get out," Annie said, taking me by the arm and pushing me through the door. "Now git," she said, closing the door in my face.

"I've got a daddy," I announced to Jerry as soon as I saw him the next day. "They got an annulment."

"What's that?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied. "But I've got a daddy anyway."

"Oh, all right," Jerry agreed. "You've got a daddy."

Maybe Grandma and Mama knew I played with Jerry, maybe they didn't. Anyway, neither of them said anything about me being away so much—but once. That afternoon Jerry and I had been whipping each other with branches off trees. We were dirty and Jerry had a cut on his face when I decided to go home. As soon as I walked into the house I knew I was in for it. Grandma was polishing her nails and Mama was pacing the floor, swearing. She probably had a fight with one of the men. She always paced the floor and swore afterward. I was always in for it, too, if I didn't stay out of reach. I came in before I noticed and she made for me.

"Look at you," she said. "God, are you a mess! Dirt all over. What you want to come in like that for? Where you been anyway?" She grabbed me by the shoulder and started shaking me. She didn't care about the dirt, and I knew it. She had seen me dirtier and hadn't said a thing. She had seen me come in late, too. She was just mad. I stiffened. I tried to keep her from budging me.

"Doris," Grandma cried, "what are you doing to my baby? Doris, stop. You come to your Grandma, baby," she said. "I won't let her hurt you." She stretched out her arms, holding the polish brush in one hand. I didn't move. I planted my feet apart on the floor and stuck out my lip.

Grandma came over to me and tried to cuddle me against her, protecting her wet polish at the same time. "Don't be afraid," she crooned. "Granny won't let her hurt you." She glanced at Mama reproachfully, her lip trembling. She smelled like talcum powder and nail polish.

"All right," Mama shouted. "All right. Spoil her. Make a brat out of her. What do I care? She's only my kid, that's all." She turned and stalked out of the room, slamming the door after her.

Grandma tried to pull me toward her. "Come over here and sit with Granny," she said. "She won't let her hurt her baby."

I didn't say anything.

Grandma drew away and sniffed a little, her nose

tilted. "Then run on out and play, dear," she said, "and let Granny finish her hails."

I stood there.

"Go on, dear, run on outside."

I just stared at her, not moving. "Oh, dear," Grandma said. "Oh, dear. I just don't know what to do with her." She fluttered out of the room with her wet nails held out in front of her, leaving the bottle of polish open on the coffee table. "I just don't understand it," she complained as she went into the hall.

I turned and went outside.

I kept right on going over to Jerry's, though. Except on rainy days. Rainy days were bad days for me. Grandma would stay in her room. Mama would either go out somewhere or stay in her room. And that was the only time that Annie really stood firm. She wouldn't let me go outside. "No," she would say, "you can't go outside. You'll track mud in all over the house."

Usually I would pick on Annie until it looked like she was going to hit me, then I would start to rummage through the house. But after a while, I had found everything that everybody had hid. When there was a fire in the big parlor, it was better. The rest of the house was gloomy, with shadows piled up against the dark wainscoating. Around the fire it was bright—brighter than on sunny days. Aunt Jennie would sit hunched over in the big chair beside the fire and stare into it, her eyes glittering, not saying anything. I would sit on the floor on the other side, staring into it, too, not saying anything. We sat in the shifting blotch of yellow while the flames twisted up from around the logs, joined, and leapt up the black chimney—blue-tipped, dancing. They were castles. They rose, rose and towered in the blackness. Then a log would break and they would fall in a snapping shower of sparks. Then others rose and others fell . . .

Grandma decided to sell the house. I never knew exactly when, but I heard her talking to Mama. The town was moving out that way, she said. She ought to sell in the interest of progress. "John always used to say . . ." she began.

"Progress, hell!" Mama interrupted.

Grandma began planning a party after that. She opened up the parlor and turned on all the chandeliers. Even the hallway was lighted and the doors to the dining room were rolled back. I watched Annie and Grandma making the refreshments. I told Jerry to watch the house that night, that we were having a party. Maybe he could even sneak up and look into the window if he were careful, I knew that Annie would put me to bed early. I knew she'd be busy, too, and wouldn't bother with me afterward. That night I waited until everyone was making a lot of noise downstairs, then I padded out into the hall. When I peeked over the rail, I could see the hall and the whole parlor beyond. It was full of people. Most

of them I had never seen before and all of them were old. A group of women were talking underneath me. I lay down flat on my stomach so they couldn't see me.

"Really, dear, there hasn't been a party on this side of town in twenty years. Why, all the old set's gone . . ."

"Betty's not any better off than any of the rest of us," another said. "She's sold this place. I suspect it doesn't even belong to her now."

Just then the front door opened and Mama came in with a man. She had on a long black dress. Her face was white and her hair was mussed. She walked into the parlor and straight to the punch bowl, her arm linked through the man's. Everybody stopped talking and looked at her. I could hear her. She turned to the man and said, "Darling, pour me some punch," and giggled.

He laughed, too. "Beautiful," he said, "I would love to. Here." he said, picking up a glass, "have one. And here, have another."

"Ladies and gentlemen," Mama said in a loud voice, holding the two glasses high, "I propose a toast—a toast to the best damn party my Mama ever gave." Then she turned and faced Grandpa's picture, holding the glasses even higher. "And a toast to Papa," she cried, "the man of the age." She stood there a minute, then reeled across the room and clicked one of her glasses to Grandma's. Grandma didn't move her glass. "You don't like it, do you?" Mama said. She laughed. Then she stopped laughing suddenly and raised her hand high again, dropping the glass. The broken pieces tinkled in the silent room. Then she threw the other glass to the floor. "Party's over, folks," she said, and laughed again. "Party's over."

The next day a man came with a stack of papers. He talked to Grandma and Mama in the parlor. I was going past on my way out and saw him there. I stopped and listened. Grandma was saying something about progress again.

"Yes'm, that's right," the man said.

"Yeah, that's right—progress," Mama muttered.

Aunt Jennie was just standing there. She saw me but she didn't say anything. I went on out. I went across the road and told Jerry that we were selling the house.

"Aren't you going to live there any more?" he asked, screwing up his face.

"I don't know. I don't guess so," I said.

"Not ever?" he asked.

"I don't guess so," I said. We just stood there for a while—not saying anything, not looking at each other. He scratched in the sand with his toe. I didn't know what to say. "Look," I said finally, "let's go get something to eat. I'll race you to the back."

We ran and stumbled up the back steps panting. We didn't talk about the moving any more.

Then we moved. A man in a big truck came and took part of our furniture. Grandpa's picture came off the wall, leaving a light square. Annie packed my clothes and left.

"Is she going for good?" I asked Grandma.

Grandma was fluttering around the house with a white thing around her hair. "What, dear?" she asked, absently tugging at a drape.

"Is Annie leaving for good?" I repeated.

"Yes, dear," she replied, giving the drape another tug.

"Where's she going?" I asked.

"I don't know, dear," Grandma said. "Now run on outside." She gave me a push. "Granny's busy now."

The next day, Grandma, Aung Jennie, Mama, and I got in a taxi. It was the first time I had been in a taxi, but I didn't much care. As we moved away, I saw Jerry standing on one side of the road staring at us, with his hands stuck down deep in the pockets of his overalls. His little sisters were standing beside him, hand in hand. The youngest had her thumb in her mouth, looking at us from under her bangs. I didn't feel like waving at them just then, but I turned around in the seat and stared back. Jerry was always muttering something about not having anything but a girl to play with. I said that I could beat him up any day. And I could.

I watched Jerry get littler and littler behind us. And the house got littler and littler, too.

"Turn around," Mama said. "What are you looking at?"

We moved into a three-room furnished apartment in town. Grandma had to move the sofa to hang Grandpa's picture, but it's still there. Aunt Jennie's getting a little feeble now. Grandma dresses up in some of her old clothes and what's left of her jewelry and takes Aunt Jennie up on the roof in the sun. They don't talk to anybody. Mama still goes out at night and comes in tight. Sometimes she gets drunk right in her room. I get up every morning before everyone else, drink some coffee and go to work. Sometimes Aunt Jennie will eat with me. I don't like my job much, but somebody's got to work around here. Sometimes at night I go out for a big time. Sometimes I just walk with a bunch of girls up and down the street and watch the lights go on, or maybe go to a movie. I used to think maybe I'd go back and see the house sometime, but I never have. I don't suppose I ever will. Somehow I don't see much point in it any more.





### STAR WATCHING

We are here to mark the season  
Turning the moon to its conclusion  
Below us Nice, the nearest constellation,  
In the long and living night,  
Sprawls silently in time, in dream is still.  
Between two darknesses we wait:  
Between two star-pointed spaces  
Is our star-watching hill.

—Cynthia Maull



